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**The Social Concepts of
George Herbert Mead**

By William C. Tremmel

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By William C. Tremmel

The author dedicates this work to his son, John Mark.

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The Social Concepts of George Herbert Mead

By William C. Tremmel*

I

George Herbert Mead

William James and John Dewey are familiar names and quickly associated with the American philosophy generally called Pragmatism, and, rightly, the name of Charles Peirce has become rather widely recognized as related at least to the beginnings of this new movement in philosophic thought. But George Herbert Mead, despite his salient contributions to Pragmatism especially in its social concepts, remains generally unknown, and this again despite the fact that in academic circles the merit of his work is widely recognized and he is "of all modern social philosophers . . . perhaps, most quoted and least criticized."¹

Mead's general obscurity and his right to acclaim are the factors prompting this study, and also governing its character and form. An attempt will be made to present George Mead and his social philosophy to an audience which presumably has not yet become familiar with either the man or his thought. This presentation will be purely introductory. No attempt will be made to support or refute Mead's work through serious critical analysis. Rather, we shall meet the man briefly as a person, list his written works, and consider several of his fundamental concepts.

There is, of course, no substitute for examining directly Mead's own writings. However, an introduction to Mead is still legitimate because of the difficulties encountered when one turns to Mead's work for the first time. There is a frustrating obscurity about his written presentations, which Kenneth Burk expressed by describing Mead as a man who wrote in paragraphs rather than sentences.² He rarely introduced a sentence simply for the sake of clarifying a preceding use of language. In reading Mead it often seems that he tried to introduce a fundamental problem at the beginning of a sentence which he intended to analyze and solve before the closing punctuation. Also, his writing is difficult because he used old forms of language to express new ways of thinking.

These comments are not intended to frighten the uninitiated reader from the adventure of Mr. Mead's books and articles. Rather they are

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1. C. J. Bittner, "G. H. Mead's Social Concept of the Self," *Sociology and Social Research*, XVI (Sept., 1931), p. 6

2. Kenneth Burke, "George Herbert Mead," *The New Republic*, XCIV (1938-39), p. 293.

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intended to encourage a preparation for this encounter that it may prove exciting and fruitful.

George Mead was born in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1863. He graduated from Oberlin College in 1883, continued his studies at Harvard University in the glorious days of James, Royce, and Palmer, and later went abroad for three years for advanced training in philosophy and psychology. In 1890 he returned to take a position on the faculty at Ann Arbor. He left Ann Arbor in 1893 to begin his long teaching career (thirty-eight years) at the University of Chicago, where he remained until his death in 1931.

In Mead we encounter, as both Dewey and T. V. Smith have asserted, a seminal mind of the very first order. "His mind," wrote Dewey, "was deeply original—in my contacts and my judgment the most original mind in philosophy in America of the last generation."³ Unfortunately for us, Mead was more of a lecturer than an author and we must meet him largely through the interpretations of several of his devoted students. T. V. Smith has lamented this fact by asserting that the discrepancy between "Mead as a man and Mead as a writer cannot but be remarked regretfully by anyone who must appraise him primarily upon the basis of his visible work."⁴ This is undoubtedly true, but the fact remains that what we do have of Mead's work (his own writing and the editing of his class notes) is worthy of careful consideration. As C. J. Bittner pointed out, Mead's mind was of the type that he could incorporate into a few short essays more germinal ideas than most writers can get into an equal number of volumes.

In our entrance into the intellectual world of Mead we are indebted in large measure to the devotion of several of his students and admirers who went so far as to employ secretaries to take down verbatim his lectures as delivered to his classes at the University of Chicago. Through such extraordinary measures, the heart of Mead's teaching has been preserved for us and appears now in three volumes posthumously published and edited by Charles W. Morris. These volumes are: *Mind, Self and Society*, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, and the *Philosophy of the Act*, also, we have a volume edited by Arthur E. Murphy entitled *The Philosophy of the Present*. Besides these four volumes, there are some sixty-eight of Mead's articles published in various magazines and journals.⁵

The volume *Mind, Self and Society* is a collection of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago to classes in social psychology. It is based upon a stenographic copy of the 1927 course in social psychology

3. John Dewey, "George Herbert Mead." *Journal of Philosophy*, XXVIII (June 4, 1931), p. 310.

4. T. V. Smith, "The Social Philosophy of George Herbert Mead." *The American Journal of Sociology*, XXXVII (Nov. 1931).

5. See the Appendix for a complete bibliography of the articles of Mead in the areas of philosophy and psychology, systematically arranged.

and an elaborate set of notes from the same course in 1930, the last year it was given. The book is written from the point of view of social behaviorism and is unique in its analysis of language and language mechanism, and in its consideration of the relationship of the *I* to the *me* in the social self. This book is of value to the philosopher, the psychologist, the linguist, and the social scientist.

The volume *The Movement of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* is also a collection of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago. It is a readable, non-technical work, which indicates Mead's affiliations in the traditional schools of thought.

The Philosophy of the Act is composed almost entirely of Mead's own unpublished writings. It is a comprehensive presentation of his philosophy, attempting to develop an epistemology, philosophy of history, cosmology, and a theory of value on the bio-social basis of Pragmatism. The work is technical, repetitious, obscure. Of all the writings it is obviously the one least intended for publication in the form presented.

The Philosophy of the Present includes the Paul Carus foundation lectures as read at the meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Berkeley in December, 1930, just a few months before Mead's death. In this work Mead was especially concerned with the last great phase of his thinking in philosophy; namely, the extension of the idea of "sociality" to include all of nature. Here we have a daring extension of the social concept into a philosophy of nature and even a metaphysical system.

It has been assumed by some persons that Mead's scarcity of publication was a mark of his modesty, and his propensity for attributing ideas that were obviously his own to the authors from whom he had derived their germinal suggestions certainly supports this claim of intellectual modesty; but Dewey, at least, attributed Mead's paucity of publication to a different cause. He asserted that the very scope of Mead's knowledge deterred him. He was highly informed in the technicalities of physical and biological science as well as the numerous facets of human phenomenon—psychology, sociology, history, economics, politics, culture. This scope diminished rather than increased his potentialities as a writer for he did not possess that "judicious ignorance" which is "always an aid to simplification."⁶ Mead lived at a time when revolutionary changes were taking place in both science and society. He was keenly aware of these changes, and his "sensitiveness—not just in general but in extensive detail—to both sides of the problems explains . . . the seeming contradiction between the systematizing character of his mind and the unsystematic nature of his public actions."⁷

6. John Dewey, "Work of George Mead," *New Republic*, LXXX(II) (July 22, 1936), p. 329.

7. *Ibid.*

Mead drew no sharp line between the activities of science and those of philosophy. He was himself both a scientist and a philosopher. To be sure, as a scientist he was primarily a theoretician, adding nothing to the factual data of the social sciences or psychology; but contributing extensively to their ideational structures. Similarly as a philosopher he was a seminal thinker rather than a system builder. If a man's thought must possess the external form of a system to entitle him to the designation of philosopher, Mead was no philosopher at all—but, then, by the same standard, neither was Plato. Mead, like Plato, was a philosopher in the sense that he addressed himself critically and fruitfully to the solution of a fundamental human problem; namely, the place of the individual in the matrix of reality. Actually what we have in Mead's works is an inherently systematic body of thought which may have been obscured by a lack of external order, but certainly not negated by it. He was a philosopher despite his failure to place his thought in a systematic order, just as he was a scientist despite the fact that he added nothing to the "factual" growth of science. His work, especially in his later years, was a "descriptive generalization," (an extensive elaboration) of the basic ideas involved in the most relevant knowledge obtainable through the techniques of scientific investigation; and here he was a scientist of a high order: His "descriptive generalizations" were a serious quest for the meaning of modern knowledge as it relates to man and his universe; and in this he was a philosopher of no mean capacity. We may call him a philosopher-scientist—indeed, one of the very best that America has thus far produced.

II

PRAGMATISM

George Mead, as indicated, belonged to the movement of modern philosophic thought commonly called Pragmatism. To see Mead's thought in proper context it is important to have in mind the general tenets of this philosophy. Stephen Pepper under the heading "Contextualism" in his book, *World Hypotheses*, informs us that Pragmatism is a metaphysical system (a world theory) rather than merely a theory of truth and/or a socio-psychological system geared to practical issues.⁸

Pragmatism is sometimes represented as a philosophy of the "common man." If this statement means that Pragmatism is a philosophy for common men, it is false. But if it is taken to mean that Pragmatism is a philosophy constructed out of the common experiences of men, it is true. Pragmatism is a system of thought which extracts its categories from the experiences of man as he engages in the "events" which constitute his existence. This fact does give Pragmatism an aura of contemporality, but

8. Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses*. (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press). 1942.

it is certainly not a simple philosophy for simple men, nor is it, as sometimes suggested, a system of thought that enables men to live without a philosophy. For although it began in Peirce and James as a theory of truth (in Peirce as a method of clarifying concepts and in James as in investigation of the volitional aspects of cognition), it has become, in fact, a systematic statement of the nature and meaning of reality—a world theory.

An Event

The event, which is the “root metaphor” of Pragmatic thought, should be thought of not as a past event, but as an event that is alive in its present. It is not something exhumed from a dead past, but that which is happening *now*. “We may call it an ‘act’ if we like, and if we take care of our use of the term” for “it is an act in and with its setting, an act in context.

“To give instances of this root metaphor . . . we should use only verbs. It is doing, and enduring, and enjoying: making a boat, running a race, laughing at a joke, persuading an assembly, unraveling a mystery, solving a problem, removing an obstacle, exploring a country, communicating with a friend, creating a poem, re-creating a poem. These acts or events are all intrinsically complex, composed of interconnected patterns . . . They are literally the incidents of life.”

With a firm hold on the nature of an event, the Pragmatist extracts his categories of reality—change, novelty, quality, time, fusion and even truth.

Change and Novelty

Consonant with the dynamic character of any specific historic event, Pragmatism affirms *radical change* as a fundamental category of reality. Everything changes. This idea is, of course, not new. It goes back at least as far as Heraclitus (500 B.C.), but to Heraclitus change advanced inexorably under the ordering principle of fate: Pragmatism takes change startlingly. Here change is not conceived of as necessarily progressive and orderly, but may be complete change, discontinuous and absolutely radical. Change so conceived brings with it the concomitant category of *novelty*. If change is complete, then newness is also complete. In Pragmatism an event may possess structural features which are absolutely novel. Thus “radical” is an accurate definitive of the Pragmatic position and gives to this position a unique standing among philosophical systems. In its basic categories, Pragmatism rejects the ancient principle that nothing can come from nothing. No other world theory asserts change and novelty in so radical a sense.

The radical concepts of change and novelty, like all Pragmatic con-

cepts, arise from the experiences of man as he engages in the business of his daily living. It is a common experience that although whatever happens in any event in which man is involved can be "related" to the structural features of previous events, it cannot be defined exhaustively in terms of those previous structures. The event is always to some degree radically new. An immediate event always possesses novel features which could not have been predicted prior to their emergence. It is, thus, impossible to predict the qualitative character of any future event. Hindsight is, indeed, better than foresight, because in hindsight the emergent novelties are knowable (they have happened and are in experience) while in foresight the novelties yet to emerge have not happened and are thus (because they are novelties) unknowable; in fact, they are non-existent. For example, the qualities and properties of water are common knowledge--water quenches thirst, washes away dirt, has a certain taste, is necessary for life, is composed of hydrogen and oxygen. What water is and does (its properties and qualities) is known because water has happened. But before the original catalysis of H_2 and O into the compound structure of water the qualities of water were unknowable because they were non-existent. There is nothing in hydrogen or oxygen either to explain or to predict the qualities of water. The qualities of water are all *ex post facto*. They are a "something" that came from "nothing."

The assertion of change and novelty as radical categories is, of course, threatened by the "appearance" of order in nature which seemingly argues for underlying permanent structures. The "relatedness" of previous structures (like hydrogen and oxygen) to later structures (like water) certainly seems to indicate an underlying system that is determinant and fixed. In the face of such threat the Pragmatist always hurries back to the historic event as experienced to point out the change and novelty which is so richly evident there. In the historic event we see in miniature a disorder, or an endless reorganizing order, which the Pragmatist insists is a microcosm of which the universe is a macrocosm. Change and novelty are real and ultimately radical. Yet the Pragmatist does not affirm chaos. His concept of disorder is not an affair of anti-order so much as a system of multi-order. The categories of reality must be so defined that whatever order we find in the world is not excluded. There can be disorder; there can be order; there can be order within disorder; there can be disorder within order; there can be different orders. In short, ours is a world in which, epoch-wise, anything can happen, and sometimes does.

Quality and Time

Also faithful to the event as experienced, Pragmatism sees reality as an affair of *qualities*. Any event comes to a person as a qualitative experience. One is, when engaged in an event, not merely in a quantitative

phony performed by a competent orchestra there are a multiple of individual musicians, performing on individual instruments, playing different melodic lines; yet the composite result is a grand fusion of sound. Fusion may be tight or loose depending upon the structure of the event and/or, as in the case of a symphony, the attention of the hearer. At times, in a symphony, the individual melodic line may stand out as the choir of voices gives way to a solo passage. Or any single melodic line can be made to defuse from the total sound of the movement by a skilled auditor who simply concentrates his attention momentarily upon what the oboeist or cellist is playing. Fusion is not merely a matter of psychology, but the real and dynamic relatedness of parts to wholes and wholes to parts; and it is presumably as extensive as the events of our cosmic epoch. Certainly fusion in Pragmatism is taken with cosmic seriousness and dignity.

This assertion of dynamic relatedness brings us quickly to two questions: What is the nature of the relatedness? What is the nature of that which is related? The event appears as a qualitative configuration of parts structured into wholes, and of wholes regulating parts. Any event, then, is both its individual parts and its unique quality of wholeness. It is an affair of "strands" and "context," (e.g., the individual musicians are the strands of the orchestra which is the context. The individual melodic lines are the strands of the symphony which is the context.) No sharp cleavage can be drawn between strand and context "because it is the connections of the strands which determine the context, and in large proportion the context determines the qualities of the strands."¹⁰

It is with this facet of Pragmatic thought that Mead's work is most concerned. It tries to define the determinative nature of the interpenetration of parts to whole and whole to parts, especially in those connections where individual men are the strands and society is the context. In his opinion the fundamental problem of all men, and consequently of all philosophy, is the relationship of the individual to society and to the whole of reality. He states, ". . . the philosophic problem that faces the community at the present time . . . [is] . . . how are we to get the universality needed, the general statement which must go with any interpretation of the world, and still make use of the differences which belong to the individual as individual?"¹¹ In his social philosophy he conceives of society as basic; yet society is not to be regarded as either absolute or self-contained. The individual is not merely a cipher, a quantitative statistic, but a creative quality which gives to the order of its existence as much as it takes. The whole is creative of the part, but the part is equally creative of the whole.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

11. G. H. Mead, *Movement of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. H. Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 417.

Truth

Before turning directly to the work of George Mead, we should complete this brief view of Pragmatism with a glance at its theory of truth. This seems essential because it was as a theory of truth that Pragmatism came to birth. In fact, both Peirce and James insisted that it was nothing more than a theory of truth.

Truth in Pragmatism is variously defined as "successful working" and "verified hypothesis." In the successful working concept truth is a matter of utility. The path of action which leads to a goal is the true path and deviation from that path is an error. Some actions succeed in attaining their goals, some do not. Some ideas meet with consensus approval; others do not. James seems to have come close to the idea of truth as mere approval when he said, "The truth is only the expedient in the way of thinking."¹²

However, with more severe precision, truth is also defined as the verified hypothesis. Here it is not the successful act that is true, but the hypothesis that leads to the successful act. Where there is no hypothesis, there is no truth or falsity, but only successful or unsuccessful action. Truth is a relationship between an hypothesis and its consequences in action. The difference between these two concepts of truth can be seen in the fact that pure trial and error behavior could produce true and false "judgments" in the successful working theory, but not in the hypothesis theory. Faithful to its event experience criterion, the verified hypothesis theory is presented as close to what truth means in our common sense experiences.

In its truth theory Pragmatism can also be presented as a "guarded" correspondence-coherence theory, for a true hypothesis corresponds to the events that verify it, and the references of the hypothesis integrate (cohere) in a meaningful system of interrelated ideas. In this view it is possible to assert that in the system of hypotheses possessed by science and philosophy we have considerable insight into the real structure of nature.

III

SOCIETY

In general the concepts of Pragmatism are drawn from the event as such, but in Mead's thought we find them drawn from the nature of a special kind of event—the event of social relations; society. Like any event the social event is a dynamic process characterized by change, novelty, quality, duration, fusion and strands in context. Society is conceived by Mead as the fundamental fact of organic existence. Basic to all life is the

12. William James, *Pragmatism*, (Longmans Green, 1922), pp. 222-224.

co-operative enterprise. To be alive is to be socially involved. Without the social event the animal (both human and non-human) could neither emerge nor persist. Especially are the organic needs which have to do with nutrition and reproduction social in character. "The behavior of all living organisms has a basically social aspect."¹³ As a matter of fact, there is no living organism whose nature is such that it could exist in complete isolation from all other living organisms. In this kind of thinking Mead is an innovator for the thinkers who preceded him had generally conceived of society as a group of interrelated individuals. Mead everywhere insists upon the primacy of society. An individual is merely an abstraction from a social group.

Especially does Mead concentrate his attention upon the social character of human existence. Each individual mind and self is completely dependent upon social intercourse; mind and selfhood (human individuality) exist only because there is a social process through which they can emerge. Concerning Mead's thought in this respect Faris writes: "The basic datum in Mead is the associative life . . . the earliest acts of man are inescapably social acts When a mother holds out her hands to her babe and the babe responds, are not both of them engaged in social conduct? Human conduct is . . . originally and essentially social, and the mind of a child seems molded in a social pattern. For the social object may be accurately defined as an object which responds; and in the world of the child there are, at first, no other objects."¹⁴

Language: The Organizing Principle in Social Relations

There are, of course, societies of animals other than human society, but human society is, according to Mead, a unique system because of the principle through which it is organized. This principle is language communication, or, as Mead puts it, "signification."

Communication (a conversation of gestures) exists below the level of language proper. Animals communicate. They exhibit behaviors which register meaningfully. Dogs snarl at each other, horses whinny; but in such situations, no matter how effective the implicit meanings may be in the gestures involved, the type of communication engaged in is not language. As Mead puts it, "The meanings are not yet in mind, the biologic individuals are not yet consciously communicating selves."¹⁵ Animal communication does not possess the quality of *signification*. This quality occurs only when gestures or symbols are used with conscious intent. "Significant symbols," Mead explains, "are the result of the ability to fill out

13. G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, ed. C. W. Morris (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 227.

14. Ellsworth Faris, "The Social Psychology of G. H. Mead," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIII (1937), p. 396.

15. G. W. Morris, "George H. Mead As Social Psychologist and Social Philosopher," an introduction to G. H. Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1934), p. xxi.

an incomplete act on the level of imagination."¹⁶ This only man can do. When an animal in a herd scents danger and begins to run, his action indicates to the other members of the herd the presence of danger. The sentinel communicates danger, but he does not have "in mind" what he is indicating to others. He does not know that he is "telling" them to run. He is simply running because there is danger.¹⁷ This is communication of gestures, but not significant communication, not language proper. To have language proper, the gesturing individual must be self-consciously aware of what he is doing. He must be able to interpret his own gestures to himself as they appear to others. "Behavioristically, this is to say that the biologic individual must be able to call out in himself the response his gesture calls out in the other, and then utilize this response of the other for the control of his further conduct. Such gestures are significant symbols. Through their use the individual is 'taking the role of the other' in the regulation of his own conduct. Man is essentially the role-taking animal. The calling out of the same response in both the self and the other gives the common content necessary for community of meaning."¹⁸

A gesture is the early phase of an act. It "means" the act. It is, so to speak, a collapsed act; and it evokes an appropriate response on the part of a second individual. *Eg.*, a dog lunges at another dog. The lunge is a gesture which means the total act. The second dog meets the attack, feints, slashes back, and this adjustive behavior is itself a gesture which causes the first dog to modify his aggression. Thus do fighting dogs communicate vividly. The series of movements (beginnings of acts; gestures) serving as stimuli evoke and control the adjustive behavior of each animal. Mead holds that "the term 'gesture' may be identified with these beginnings of social acts which are stimuli for the response of other forms."¹⁹

There is also involved in this gesture-response situation more than mere overt action and reaction. Gestures indicate inner attitudes. Lying back of the acts are emotional attitudes—fear, anger, love, friendliness, suspicion. Thus we can say that gestures signify inner meanings, but we must not assume that these inner meanings are necessarily in the "mind" (in the self-conscious awareness) of the gesturing individual. A dog may be angry without *knowing* that *he* is angry. Indeed, this is, according to Mead, precisely what makes him a dog rather than a man: he does not *know* that *he* is angry; and this is so primarily because he does not know that he is a *he*. The dog is conscious, but not self-conscious. If the "idea" is in mind, if the individual knows what he is doing, the gesture means not only what it is interpreted as meaning, but it means the idea inside the gesturing individual as well. When we have both of these areas of

16. Ellsworth Faris, "The Social Psychology of George H. Mead," pp. 398-399.

17. G. H. Mead, "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol," *Journal of Philosophy*, XIX (1922), p. 160.

18. Morris, "George H. Mead As Social Psychologist and Social Philosopher," p. xxi.

19. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 42.

meaning involved in a social act (when the gesture means an idea and arouses the same idea in another individual), we have a significant gesture, a significant symbol, language. "Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed; and in all conversations of gestures within the social process, whether external (between different individuals) or internal (between a given individual and himself), the individual's consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures."²⁰

The vocal gesture is the agent which makes true language (significant communication) possible. This gesture has importance because it has as much affect upon the individual speaking as the one listening. "The peculiar importance of the vocal gesture is that it affects the individual who makes it as much as it affects the individual to whom it is directed."²¹ A word tends to call out in the speaker a set of responses similar to those evoked in the hearer. Thus, they respond alike. They communicate significantly.

The organizing principle in human society is, then, significant communication. Through this instrumentality the human animal is able to indicate to himself what another person is going to do, and then control his own response accordingly. Other organic societies are organized in terms of physiological differentiation (insects)²² or instinctive relationships (herd animals),²³ but human society is what it is because man can indicate to himself through language the meaning and character of actions and reactions. "In man the functional differentiation through language gives an entirely different principle of organization which produces not only a different type of individual but also a different type of society."²⁴

Language communication, and thus human society, arises out of the nature of the central nervous system. Human society is possible because the central nervous system has reached its highest development in man. The human brain is the instrument which makes it possible for man to analyze his responses and reconstruct them, and this nervous system has at its disposal the vocal mechanism. Because of these two (the brain and the voice) man has developed a process of communication, arising in a matrix of social action, which places his intelligence at his own disposal. he can think.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

21. G. H. Mead, *Movement of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. H. Moore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 379.

22. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 231.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

In Mead's thought it is necessary to keep clearly in mind the primacy of society. Communication is not to be conceived as existing in itself, or as something which exists apart from social process. Social process is absolutely necessary to render communication possible; yet significant communication is a controlling principle in social process. And here we have the Pragmatic concept of strands in context. The context gives the strands their qualities, which in turn reach out to mold the context into its uniqueness.

The Generalized Other

The social process on the human level is characterized by what Mead calls the "generalized other." In human society there are generalized social attitudes; there is a continuity of response on the part of all the individuals involved in the social group. These common responses are called institutions. "The institution represents a common response on the part of all members of the community to a particular situation."²⁵ When an individual takes into himself a generalized social attitude (when he internalizes the generalized other) he becomes a social self. He is able to address himself in the attitude of the group, or the community; and in this way he becomes "a definite self over against the social whole to which he belongs."²⁶

Certain institutions tend to crush out the effective relations of the self in controlling the social process. They say in effect, "fit in or else." But this is not an essential characteristic of the social process. Social processes (institutions) can be "flexible and progressive, fostering individuality rather than discouraging it."²⁷ The "generalized other" is not necessarily the antagonist of the personal self. In fact, proper social institutions are essential to mature individual selves, "for the individuals involved in the general social life-processes of which social institutions are organized manifestations can develop and possess fully mature selves or personalities only in so far as each one of them reflects or prehends in his individual experience these organized social attitudes and activities which social institutions embody and represent."²⁸

The internalizing of the "generalized other" makes it possible for a person to respond not merely to another individual, but to the community as a whole. Furthermore, this internalizing of the "generalized other" is, according to Mead, precisely what makes a person a self and gives him the exclusively human process called mind. "The society in which we belong represents an organized set of responses to certain situations in which the individual is involved . . . in so far as the individual can take those

25. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

26. G. H. Mead, "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness," *Journal of Philosophy*, IX (1912), p. 80.

27. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 262.

28. *Ibid.*

organized responses over into his own nature, and call them out by means of the symbol in the social response, he has a mind in which mental processes can go on, a mind whose inner structure he has taken from the community to which he belongs."²⁹

In the thinking of Mead, society is a tightly woven, intricately involved system. Out of a basic social relation, selfhood and mind emerge. These selves and minds then turn back upon their society inserting criticism and exercising control. Society is itself an event with all the characteristics of an event—emergence, duration, fusion, strands, context; in short, an endless system of reconstruction whose essential nature rests upon an internal and dynamic process rather than a fixed and final structure. Concerning this point of view in Mead's thought, Dewey writes: "The central importance he attached to the idea of reconstruction as something continuously going on in nature, in human institutions, and in ideas should never be forgotten . . . Mead is consistently asking: 'How are we to unite in a coherent way the presence of those relatively settled orders to which the name of all uniformities, laws, universals is given, with the unremitting occurrences of individuality, novelty and the unpredictable.'"³⁰

The Living Form and Its Environment

Life processes are carried on within an environmental framework. There are societies, there are individuals within societies, and there is a world surrounding the entire structure.

Usually we think of the environment as a pre-existing structure into which living forms enter, or in which they emerge. Mead, taking his usual different approach, conceives of an environment as that which is created by the sensitivity of an organism. "The only environment to which the organism can react is one that its sensitivity reveals."³¹ An environment is not a predetermined order, but an event (a relationship) between an organism and the world made possible to it by its own sensitivity.

It follows from this also that any adaptive change occurring in an organism will have reciprocal effects in the environment. Thus we can assert that the living form has affective relationships with its environment in two important ways. First, by its sensitivity it determines the extent and nature of the environment. Second, by adaptive behavior it modifies the environment. The organism "picks out" its environment, and recreates its environment. This latter relationship is more characteristic of man than other organisms. To be sure, bees build hives and birds build nests, this remaking to some extent their environments, but man changes the face of the earth. "The human form establishes its own home where it wishes; builds cities; brings its water from great distances; establishes the

29. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

30. John Dewey, "The Work of George Mead," *The New Republic*, LXXXVII (July 22, 1936), p. 329.

31. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 246.

vegetation which shall grow about it; determines the animals that will exist, gets into that struggle which is going on now with insect life, determining what insects shall continue to live; is attempting to determine what micro-organisms shall remain in its environment. It determines, by means of its clothing and housing, what the temperature shall be about it; it regulates the extent of its environment by means of its methods of locomotion . . . The community as such creates its own environment by being sensitive to it . . . The human situation is a development of the control which all living forms exercise over their environment in selection and in organization, but the human society has reached an end which no other form has reached, that of determining, within certain limits, what its inorganic environment will be."³²

IV MIND

Mind, Body and Society

In the seventeenth century Rene Descartes drew a sharp distinction between thought and extension, between mind and matter. This rigorous separation created a metaphysical basis for the young quantitative natural sciences of his day, but it also created a dilemma for his philosophical successors: how can there be any effective relations between mind and body if each is itself a completely closed system. Certainly Descartes' own interaction theory was an inadequate explanation; and Malebranche's "occasionalism" and Leibniz's "monads in pre-established harmony," resting as they did in the presupposition of Divine action, never commanded a widespread acceptance. Both Spinoza and Kant made valiant attempts to bridge the Cartesian gap with identity theories in which mind and matter were conceived as merely two aspects of a unifying reality—Spinoza's mysterious underlying order that is God, and Kant's equally mysterious *ding-an-sich*.

Another approach to solving the Cartesian body-mind problem would be to deny the dualism. If either mind or body could be subsumed under the other, the problem would possibly disappear. But which is to be regarded as basic and which derived? Which possesses ontological status—the physical or the psychical?

Bishop Berkeley, as a spokesman for idealism, affirmed the primacy of the psychical by denying the ultimate reality of the physical. In his psychical monism he asserted that matter is, in the last analysis, merely a shadow of thought. Already John Locke (albiet in a different reference) had asserted that knowledge existed only in ideas. Berkeley merely went a step further asserting that "all things are ideas." What we "see" in the

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250: 252.

world is far more mind-dependent than commonly supposed. All qualities, both primary and secondary, are mind dependent. Not only is knowledge a matter of our "ideas" about physical laws, but the physical laws known in knowledge are themselves the "ideas" of God. Ultimately (ontologically) matter does not exist. It is simply a manifestation of mind.

But while idealists argued with exciting subtlety, another kind of thinker was setting a new path in the opposite direction. Mind, it was asserted; is merely an epiphenomenon of matter. David Hume embarrassed the Berkelian view by pointing out that while the idealist could find no matter in the real world, but only ideas, he could find no ideas in mind, but only perceptions. ". . . For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity. If any one upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me."³³ Hume's skepticism argued keenly against the idealist's solution to the body-mind problem, but actually the position of mind as epiphenomenon had already been initiated by John Locke. In Locke's denial of the existence of innate ideas, in the famous doctrine of *tabula rasa*, he had set the stage for the latter-day behaviorists.

In a sense Mead's "Social Behaviorism" is a twentieth century improvement on the Lockean position, yet significantly different, and stemming not from John Locke, but from the Behaviorism of men like John Watson.

Modern Behaviorism had entered the field of psychology through a study of animal conduct, and conduct became its central concern. Because the experimenter could not get inside the animals to experience his feelings, attitudes, memories, or "thoughts," these states of consciousness were generally disregarded. Men like Watson insisted that what cannot be objectively observed lies outside the province of science. Thus the private aspects of experience—attitudes, thoughts, emotions, images,

33. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1874), Bk. I, part IV, Section VI.

memory—were dropped from the study of psychology and attention was directed to the animal in action. When Mead entered the field, himself a behaviorist, he felt this reduction of the field of psychology to objectively observable conduct was an unacceptable reduction of relevant data. Watson was ruling out of bounds the very things a mature psychology must explain—the inner, real nature of mind, thought and thinking. “That which belongs (experientially) to the individual *qua* individual, and is accessible to him alone, is certainly included within the field of psychology, whatever else is or is not thus included. This is our best clue in attempting to isolate the field of psychology. The psychological datum is best defined, therefore, in terms of accessibility. That which is accessible, in the experience of the individual, only to the individual himself, is peculiarly psychological.”³⁴

To get a more adequate statement of what is meant by “having an idea” or “getting a concept,” yet remain firmly in the area of behavioristic explanations, Mead approaches his definition in terms of social dependency. Mind, with all its conscious states, is socially derived. It is not reducible merely to a psychical entity nor to a mere physiological activity, but is the product of social communication when this communication has arrived at the level of proper language usage (i.e., is significant communication); and this is possible because man possesses an adequately developed central nervous system, a vocal mechanism, and exists in a society of significantly communicating selves. Indeed, Mead holds that without this social intercourse a human infant would never become as intelligent as a highly domesticated cat. There is nothing in the human organism which would enable it to self-condition its own reflexes to the point of getting ideas. But in a person’s intercourse with other socialized human animals he does possess such a mechanism. In significant speech a person hearing a word uses it with reference to himself. He has a personal response to what is said, and this is true whether he is the speaker or the listener, for as the speaker he is also listening to himself. To some degree he is calling out in himself the same response he is evoking in his hearer. He is putting himself in the place (taking the role) of the other person. Together they are getting common ideas. Dewey, writing with regard to Mead’s concept of mind, states: “. . . mind arrives when ideas first play their part in a social act. Mind does not emerge from nature when organisms equipped for reflection emerge, but when in the experience of such organisms, significant gestures replace non-significant gestures.”³⁵

In general Mead’s predecessors in behavioristic psychology had neglected the social process as it affects the development of human mind, concentrating their attention upon the biological behavior of single in-

34. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 5.

35. John Dewey, “George Herbert Mead,” *Journal of Philosophy*, XXVIII (June 4, 1931), p. 31.

dividuals. The social scientists had neglected the biological aspects of social process by conceiving of it as somehow mentalistic. Mead takes a fresh approach by defining mind in biosocial terms. He sees the social order as the source and matrix of mind, for only within a social system, structured with significant communication, can the rational behavior definable as mind emerge. He endeavors to show "that mind and self are without residue social emergents;" yet he does not neglect the biological factors essential to human mind—a highly developed central nervous system and the organs of speech.

It should be noted that Mead made a singular contribution to modern thought when he identified language communication as the social mechanism through which mind achieves its status in reality. Within the social process of significant communication (through the internalization of the conversation of gestures as presented in human speech) mind arises. A child is not born with a mind. He is born with the biological equipment necessary for mind, but mind itself is achieved when he has matured sufficiently and his social gestures rise to the level of significant communication. In short, the human animal is transformed from a purely biological organism into a "minded" individual through the agency of language communication.

Language

Mead feels that we are too prone to think of language as a set of arbitrary symbols affixed to ideas. "We assume that there are sets of ideas in persons' minds and that those individuals make use of arbitrary symbols which answer to the intent [of the ideas] which the individuals had."³⁶ But this approach to language is misleading. Actually, Mead tells us, to understand language for what it really is we must see it "from the point of view of the gestural type of conduct within which it existed without being as such a definite language. And we have to see how the communicative function could have arisen out of that prior sort of conduct."³⁷ As illustrated in Part III, what we find in language is not merely symbols attached to ideas, but an extensive system of pre-existing social activity which has become "self-conscious." By the time a child can use words meaningfully he is a well socialized animal already experienced in communicating in non-significant symbols. He has been (without self-conscious intent) kicking, crying, smiling, laughing, reaching; making his needs known to a receptive mother. He has been communicating, but without language. He has been a gesturing individual, but not a "minded" individual possessing "ideas" to which he has attached symbols. He will be transformed gradually from a purely biologic individual into a minded organism when he begins to use words. When language is introduced into his complex of

36. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 17.

37. *Ibid.*

needs and gestures it will become the instrument of his rise to self-consciousness and cognition.

One begins to understand the nature, meaning and importance of language only when, like Mead, he doubts "that . . . a consciousness of a self as an object would ever have arisen in man if he had not had the mechanism of talking to himself . . ." "When a person can finally communicate properly in language forms he is able as Mead says, "to call out in himself the response of the other for the control of his own further conduct."³⁸ Thorough language communication he has established is unique society and is able to step into the shoes of other persons (assume their roles) and thus become not only a person to those about him, but a person to himself. This is essential if there is to be a community of meaning. "The vocal gesture is the actual fountain head of language proper and all derivative forms of symbolization; and so of mind," which is, in fact, "the presence in behavior of significant symbols."⁴⁰ When conceived in this most magnificent fashion language breaks from the confines of philology to explain grandly the genius of human self-consciousness and reflective thinking.

Reflective Intelligence

Mead limits the area of mind as such to that characteristically human behavior called "reflective intelligence." And he defines reflective intelligence as that state of human awareness in which the future is present in terms of conscious ideas. "The intelligent man as distinguished from the 'intelligent' animal presents to himself what is going to happen."⁴¹ A squirrel will on blind impulse store away food for the winter, which is precisely what a provident man will do. But the man stores food not on impulse, but because he knows (has an idea in mind) of what the winter will be like. In the human mind the future exists in the form of ideas. Man has the capacity of imagining what is not but what well may be.

Reflective intelligence arises only within the condition of self-consciousness and is characterized by the purposive control of an organism over its own conduct. The world of an animal is the world happening of moment. Animals respond directly in terms of what the environment presents without conscious foresight. Man can do otherwise. The distinguishing difference between a detective and a bloodhound (according to Mead) rests in the fact that the detective can indicate to himself the future events which will lead to his taking of the culprit. The bloodhound merely follows the scent. "Thinking is an elaborate process of . . . presenting the world so that it will be favorable for conduct . . . Thinking is pointing

38. G. H. Mead, "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness," *Journal of Philosophy*, IX (1912), p. 405.

39. Morris, "George H. Mead As Social Psychologist and Social Philosopher," p. XI.

40. *Ibid.*, p. XXII.

41. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 119.

out—to think about a thing is to point out before acting.”⁴² Reflective intelligence is simply the whole process of selecting, organizing, choosing where alternate possibilities for action exist. “The central nervous system makes possible the implicit initiation of a number of possible alternative responses with reference to any given object or objects for the completion of that act; and thus makes possible the exercise of intelligent or reflective choice in the acceptance of that one among those possible alternative responses which is to be carried into overt effect. It is an advantage to have these responses ready before we get to the object. If our world were right on top of us, in contact with us, we would have no time for deliberation. There would be only one way of responding to that world. Through his distance organs and his capacity for delayed response the individual lives in the future with the possibility of planning his life with reference to that future.”⁴³ In man the future, before it actually happens, can be presented meaningfully in terms of ideas, and in this way conduct regarding the future can be controlled. The job of the mind is to organize and control the responses set in motion by stimuli that one may become significantly aware of what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen, to the end of making effective responses in the control of conduct.

The Mind and Meaning

Normally we think of meaning as a state of conscious awareness, an idea, a psychical addition to an objective situation, but Mead insists that the mechanism of meaning precedes any awareness of it, and that meaning is in no way dependent upon consciousness. A gesture and the subsequent phases of the social act (of which the gesture is an early part) constitutes the field wherein meaning arises. A gesture indicates or stands for the oncoming act. When a second individual responds to the gesture in terms of the total action implicated in the gesture, meaning emerges. The response of an organism to the gesture of another organism is the meaning of that gesture. “Meaning is . . . not to be conceived, fundamentally, as a state of consciousness, or as a set of organized relations existing or subsisting mentally outside the field of experience into which they enter; on the contrary, it should be conceived objectively, as having its existence entirely within this field itself.”⁴⁴ Below the human level of self-consciousness the conversation of gestures is non-significant (i.e., it is conversation where in self-consciousness is not involved), but it is none-the-less meaningful. “Nature has meaning and implication but not indication by symbols. The symbol is distinguishable from the meaning it refers to. Meanings are in nature, but symbols are the heritage of man.”

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

(A symbol is a gesture, a sign, a word) . . . "which is addressed to the self when it is addressed to another individual, and is addressed to another, in form to all other individuals, when it is addressed to the self."⁴⁵ By attaching meaning to response, Mead maintains his behavioristic position, yet gives a more adequate explanation for ideation. The mechanism for meaning, ideas, mind is lodged in the "triadic relation between gesture, adjustive response, and the resultant of the social act which the gesture indicates"⁴⁶

The Mind and Universals

In a similar way, Mead maintains a behavioristic position with regards to the more difficult problem (behavioristically speaking) of mind and the universal. In our experiences there are facts of particularity which can be isolated as sensations and as such are passing in character. We experience facts of red and chairs and trees and dogs and the like. But there are not only facts of red, but redness as such. The facts of red (red things) pass in and out of existence, but there is also an "eternal" character red which does not pass. There is a quality of redness that is universal. And the same is true of all classifiable particulars. When we pass from the particulars to the universals we discover that we no longer have a group of sensuous elements, but rather a character of being.

Universals cannot be disregarded for thinking takes place in terms of them. Now, if we think of universals, and think in universals, they must be real, there must be something we think about; yet whatever it is, it is certainly not contained in any particular occurrence. Must we not therefore assume the reality of subsistent entities, a realm of essence to account for these non-extended elements of our thinking? Mead thinks not. A universal, he insists, like any particular meaning, is to be found in the response of an organism. When one responds to a dog, a tree, a chair, a particular of red, etc., his response is a response of recognition as well as a response towards an object in the field of his vision. This response of recognition is a universal, not a particular. The nervous system provides a system of reactions to specific stimuli, and also a mechanism for recognizing the object to which we respond. Recognition is the ability of the organism to respond in a common way to a number of particular stimuli. For example, in attempting to drive a nail without a hammer one may reach for a convenient stone, or for any other object of adequate heft to serve the purpose of driving the nail. Here the universal is seen as a common response to a whole set of particulars, and this common response is exactly what is meant by recognition.⁴⁷ "When we use the term 'recognition' we may mean no more than that we pick up an object that serves this particular purpose;

45. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

what we generally mean is that the character of the object that is a stimulus to its recognition is present in our experience."⁴⁸ In this way we have something that is universal over against various particulars.

As suggested, thinking takes place in terms of universals. Mead points out that when we think of a spade we are not confined to any particular spade, but may think in terms of spade in general. He insists, however, that this spade in general (this universal) does not exist in some realm of essence, does not have subsistent being. With Dewey, he argued that what we do is abstract those features of structural similarity which all spades have in common. Those features which exist (have their being) in all spades constitute what we mean by spade in general. They are the universal and eternal qualities of spades. However, these qualities have their real existence only in particular spades.⁴⁹ A universal is a response of recognition to the structural similarities of particulars.

V

Self

The Self and Society

Before Mead, Cooley had worked at the idea of the "self" as a social product. "He was especially interested in showing that the "self" . . . arises as a counter-part of the selves of others."⁵⁰ But Cooley was unable to describe the mechanism by which the self was produced from the social situation. It was Mead who saw this mechanism in the social gesture. "The advantage of Mead's contention, that gesture is the mechanism by means of which mental life [and selfhood] is carried on, lies in the fact that all activity can be traced to some stimulation of the senses. Cooley and others [Wundt, Baldwin, McDougall] had to assume some sort of mental entity, able to act on its own accord, making use of the body as a means to an end. Mead, on the contrary, gave a truly behavioristic description of how mental life originates and functions in an inter-stimulation and response situation."⁵¹

The gesture is basic to the emergence of self-consciousness, but again, as with the emergence of mind, it is that very special type of gesture that is basic—the gesture of significant communication, language. As Mead conceives of language as essential to the emergence of mind, so does he conceive of it as essential to the development of self-consciousness⁵² or self-

48. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

50. L. L. Redmond, "Social Psychology or Psychological Sociology," (ms. unpublished) p. 174.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

52. It should be noted that consciousness in Mead's thought is not merely animal awareness, something subcutaneous, but a set of vital relations which exist between an organism and its environment. Experience is not located at any point in the nervous system. It is rather the total event wherein the organism is stimulated by the environment and responds to it. Thinking goes on within the organism, but it is a mistake to assume that all we call thought goes on only inside a head. The character of the stimulus (the good-

hood. A social process is always prior and prerequisite to the emergence of self. "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to the other individuals within that process."⁵³ Solipsism is a psychological impossibility. "There must be other selves if one's own self is to exist."⁵⁴

Self, Body and Mind

Mead points out that although the body and the self are together they are not the same thing. A body can operate successfully without a self, or, on the other hand, a self can function fully despite the loss of various parts of the body.⁵⁵ An amputated leg or a removed appendix does not impair selfhood, and body metabolism may function perfectly where there is virtually no self-consciousness present. Furthermore, whereas all the instructions for physical maturity are laid down with the union of the human egg and sperm, no such thing is true of the self. Selfhood has its conception in social intercourse, not in coition.

Again, Mead insists that the mind and the self are not identical. The mind is contained within the self, but does not constitute the self. "The . . . self is constituted . . . of the entire relational pattern of social behavior and experience in which the individual is implicated, and which is reflected in the structure of the self; but many of the aspects or features of this entire pattern do not enter into consciousness, so that the unity of the mind is in a sense an abstraction from the more inclusive unity of the self."⁵⁶

The Self and Language

Selfhood begins in the conversation of gestures,⁵⁷ but if it is to be fulfilled it must rise to the level of significant communication (language proper).⁵⁸ Only as this happens can the self become the necessary "object to itself" which is essential to true selfhood. A self is a self only when it knows that it is a self, when it is to itself both subject and object. "The self is . . . a subject which is its own object; but the object is the gift of others, and the self could not arise unless social experience had defined our attitudes."⁵⁹ In significant communication we continually place ourselves in the situation of our auditors, *i.e.*, we take their roles, we arouse in our-

ness or badness of an investment, for example) is outside. A nervous system must be involved if experience (consciousness) is to take place, but a nervous system is but one necessary condition. A system of stimuli is equally essential.

53. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 135.

54. G. H. Mead, "Social Psychology as Counterpart to Physiological Psychology," *Psychological Bulletin*, VI (1909), p. 403.

55. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 136.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

59. T. V. Smith, "The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead," *The American Journal of Sociology*, XXXVII (Nov., 1931), p. 377.

selves the same attitudes we are arousing in them. "Through the interaction of certain organic senses—notably the voice and the ears—we come to respond to ourselves as we respond to others. We do this because already from infancy we have been responding to others. When we respond to ourselves as we have responded to others, we become an other to ourselves."⁶⁰ In this way we get "outside ourselves" and the self which we are becomes objectified to us. A self, then, is "that which can be an object to itself," and is "essentially a social structure," arising only "in social experience."⁶¹ It is true that after a self has arisen it can provide its own social experience. A person can talk to himself. He can create a social process detached from any other human animal, but, said Mead, "it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience."⁶²

Childhood Play and Children's Games

A significant step in selfhood is taken through the mechanisms of childhood play and children's games. Mead points out that there is a form of play which precedes the game level of childhood activities. This form of play is playing at being something. A child plays at being a policeman, a fireman, a soldier, and-so-forth. As such he is often both himself and someone else. As a policeman he may arrest himself, shoot himself, put himself in jail. In this way he becomes vividly the object of himself.⁶³ And games are even more elaborate devices for the creation of *self-awareness*. In a game a child is involved not with his imaginary other, but with real others. In order for him to enter into a game effectively he must be able to assume the role of each of the other persons involved in the game, and he must be able to recognize the relationship of those roles to each other and to himself. "The game represents the passage in the life of the child from taking the role of others in play to the organized part that is essential to self-consciousness in the full sense of the term."⁶⁴ A small child is not a fully organized self. He responds to immediate stimuli, but not to life as a whole. In the playing of the games he takes his first significant step towards wholeness. "The apparatus of self-consciousness . . . is borrowed from the group The technique here involved is that of 'role-assumption.' As children our 'whole vocation,' first in play, then in games, is to take the roles of others until those roles become ours and them us."⁶⁵

The game is the beginning of a child's real socialization for it involves precisely what he must do with regard to his whole community if a full selfhood is to be attained. The attitude of the whole community, as in-

60. *Ibid.*

61. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 140.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

65. T. V. Smith, "The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead," p. 377.

licated, is what Mead called the "generalized other." In games or in other organized group activities the individual is able to take on the generalized other as he addresses himself in the attitudes of the whole group. In such action he becomes a definite self over against the social whole to which he belongs. He becomes a self-conscious person—a subject that is its own object.

The Self and the Generalized Other

In the development of full selfhood, Mead recognizes two major stages: (1) that in which the self is constituted simply of the attitudes of various other individuals with which he has engaged in special social acts, such as play and games. And (2) that stage of full development when a person's self is constituted not only of the attitudes of particular individuals, but also by the internalized attitudes of the whole community—the generalized other. Until this latter stage is achieved, the person involved is not a whole person; he has no definite "character;" no definite personality. A human animal is not a complete self until it has taken the attitudes and institutions of some social group and internalized them in its own behavior.⁶⁶ To be a self one must know *that* he is (be self-conscious) and *what* he is (be to some degree a particular example of a generalized other). The achievement of selfhood is a gradual development in the life of the infant and child, and presumably it arose gradually also in the life of the race.

The *I* and the *Me*

That part of the self which comes from the social environment Mead calls the *me*. It is that which is given to the individual by the world around him. It is his community dominated consciousness, his censor, his conscience. But there is more to a human personality than internalized social attitudes. The process of selfhood is dynamic. Not only does the environment do something to the individual, but the individual does something to the environment. There is a part of the self which responds to the generalized other defining and ordering it in a new, different, unpredictable form. The part of the self which responds over against the *me* is the *I*. The *I* is "something" which responds to the social situation. According to Mead, the *I* has "a sustained identity which is socially underived."⁶⁷ (In the knowledge of this writer this something "socially underived" Mead fails to define behavioristically, or any other way.)

The *I* and the *me* are two aspects of every social individual. The one aspect (the *me*) is the common property of the community, the other (the *I*) is unique, idiosyncratic, personal. No person is exhausted by either

66. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 162.

67. John Dewey, "George Herbert Mead," *Journal of Philosophy*, XXVIII (June 4, 1931), p. 38.

of these aspects, and both aspects "are essential to the self in its full expression."⁶⁸ The *I* is active, dynamic, outgoing, impulsive. The *me* is conservative, orderly, socially respectable. It is the generalized self or the rational self, existing in and for the social organization. It is the basis of the self's entering into the experience of others, and that which constitutes the individual as a member of a social group.

Although the *I* and the *me* are two aspects of the social individual, they are not two distinct entities. They are not detached from each other, but are two facets of a single process. In fact, the *me* is that which gives form and structure to the *I*, without which the individual would lack both meaning and control in his actions as an individual.⁶⁹ Mead points out the control of the *I* by the *me* in Freud's concept of the censor. The *me* represents the "will of the group" internalized as the conscience of the individual. Through education the *I* is given a *me*; the social mores are inculcated into the consciousness of the individual. Social control "is the expression of the *me* over against the expression of the *I*. It sets the limits, it gives the determination that enables the *I* . . . to use the *me* as means of carrying out the undertakings that all are interested in."⁷⁰

The *me* gives structure to the *I*, but it never completely explains the *I*, for the *I* always affects the situation with its own unique character. The response of the *I* is never entirely determined by the environmental situation; it is always different from what the situation demands. "So there is always a distinction . . . between the *I* and the *me*. The *I* both calls out the *me*, and responds to it. Taken together, they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience. The self is essentially a social process going on with those two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience."⁷¹

The self, then, is a responding organism endowed with a capacity and propensity for unpredictable response. In other words, there is an *I* as well as a *me* involved in the self. The *I* is that which responds to the *me*. To be sure, the *I* may be little more than reflection of the *me*—a reflection of the general attitudes and patterns of the social group, but this is not necessarily so. A person may respond so dynamically to what is given in the environment that the normal attitudes and responses of the *me* are transformed, or even the whole pattern of culture. (Men like Plato, and Jesus, and Einstein are salient examples of the dynamic effect of the *I* on the social order.) This power to change the social environment, Mead defines as genius. The degree to which a social order has to redefine itself because of the impact of an individual is the degree of genius possessed by

68. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, p. 199.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

that individual. "To the degree we make the community in which we live different we all have what is essential to genius, which becomes genius when the effects are profound."⁷²

Exactly what the *I* is seems to have escaped investigation. Some students of psychology assert that it is actually an unknown, unknowable existent, and Mead's thinking on the subject is either vague or nonexistent. In his attempt to remove the covering of mystery and miracle from the explanation of mind and self and give them naturalistic (behaviouristic) interpretations, Mead does succeed in pushing the mystery back in the psyche. Mind and conscience are no longer so mysterious; but the mystery still remains in the *I*. This vital element which constitutes the inner spring of action in human behavior is unaccounted for. It is the element which gives spontaneity, novelty, uniqueness, to the human personality. It is that which keeps the self from being submerged in the environment as a mere puppet. It is of first importance. Mead recognizes this, admits it, glories in it, but does not explain it. The *I* is simply there.

VI

PHILOSOPHY OF THE PRESENT

"Reality exists in a present. The present of course implies a past and a future, and to these both we deny existence."⁷³ With this rather startling statement, Mead announces his philosophy of temporal process. The term "present" as used in this reference does not mean merely a contemporary situation, the passing moment, but the status of an object or an event when it occurs and while it is occurring. In denying the reality of the past and the future, Mead means that there is no such thing as a real past (a cosmic entity) somewhere behind us or a real future in existence somewhere ahead of us. The "past" when it was in actual existence was not a past at all, but a passing present. The "future" when it comes into actual existence will not be a future, but a present. Past and present when properly used are terms which denote not entities that have been or will be, but existing conditions involved in a present.

The Past

The past is not a previous present. It is a rational account explaining the emergent of the immediate present. The past is not just something that happened before, but what happened before *as it is related* to what is happening now, and this relationship is a creative one. Although the previous present set the conditions from which the immediate present arises, each emerging present is sufficiently novel to recreate what went

72. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

73. G. H. Mead, *Philosophy of the Present*, ed. A. E. Murphy (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1932), p. 1.

before, giving it a new perspective. The novelty of the present reorganizes what went before into a real past. "The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears it does not, by definition, follow from the past."⁷⁴ History is an endless reconstruction of the past redesigned to explain the emergence of novelty in the passing present. "If we could know everything implied in our memories, our documents and our monuments, and were able to control all this knowledge, the historian would assume that he had what was absolutely correct. But a historian of the time of Aristotle, extending thus his known past, would have reached a correct past which would be at utter variance with the known world of modern science."⁷⁵

We might object at this point asserting that the view point or interpretation of the historian changes, but not the past itself; the past is not changed because we come to view it in a different way. But this is exactly the point Mead is trying to make. The facts of previous passing presents are gone and irrevocable, but this is not the past. The past is that which explains not what was, but what gave rise to what is. It is only in relationship to a present that former happenings achieve their character of pastness. A past is always a past of some present. It is never a past of itself. Whenever emergence occurs a new perspective is achieved, a new relatedness created. "The historian does not doubt that something happened. He also proceeds upon the assumption that if he could have all the facts or dates, he could determine what it was that happened But if there is emergence the reflection of this into the past at once takes place. There is a new past, for from every new rise the landscape that stretches behind us becomes a different landscape."⁷⁶

It is the fact of emergence that makes the past a past. The temporal process (historic passage) is not merely a deterministic push from behind, for each passing present has backward implications arising from its own quality of uniqueness. The recreation of the past is not a matter of psychology. At each instant our world is becoming a new world and as each emergent arises in a passing present, that emergent rewrites the past. History is a process of endless temporal change. It is an affair of both novelty and fusion. This is to say that novelty emerges within a framework of determining conditions, but it is never completely determined or explainable in terms of those conditions. "There is always some sort of novelty about what happens in the most common place sort of an experience and the most ordinary sort of actions, always a tang of novelty about whatever takes place. That novelty is something which cannot possibly be predicted."⁷⁷ Yet it arises out of previous conditions

74. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

77. Mead, *Movement of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 116.

and once arisen can be seen as reasonably related to those conditions. Thus can we say that the present always arises from a previous present and proceeds to reorder what has gone before from a previous present into a real (contemporaneously existing) past.

Summarily, the novelty of a present is real, but real within a relational, temporal process. That is, once the new has emerged it can be fixed into a relational, causal pattern with the facts and events which preceeded it. But this is *ex post facto*. Prior to the emergence of the novelty of any present it could not have been completely predicted. "The world is continually changing in ways in which we cannot predict. Of course, we may be able to predict that it will change, but we cannot tell what sort of world it is going to become The world is continually blossoming out into a new universe."⁷⁸ It is only when the passing present has arisen that we can "undertake to show that it, or at least the conditions that determine its appearance can be found in the past that lay behind it. Thus the earlier 'past' out of which it emerged as something which did not involve it are taken up into a more comprehensive past that does lead up to it."⁷⁹ This means, simply, that the emergence of novelty in each passing present reorders the past into a different structure than it was when it was itself a passing present. History is an endless process of reconstruction, and historians do not reclaim the "past" that was, but discover the past that is being created.

The Future

As the past is related to the present (as the rational conditions out of which the present arose), so is the present related to the future. The present sets the conditions for the emergence of what is yet to happen. These conditions of possibility constitute the future. The future is not what actually happens later on, for what actually happens later on is not a future, but a present with all its attendant novelty. When the future is actualized in a present it comes into existence as a structure of novelty, related to what went before, yet different from it, and recreating what went before into a new past.

Because what happens in the "future" is always different from what might have been expected, we can never really see ahead. The only thing we can do is look at the past, then turn quickly and look to the future. In this way we predict something of what the road ahead will be like. The future will take tenuous form in our minds. "But what the actual content of it is going to be . . . [we] . . . can never tell. Our insurance companies try to make a guess at it, and they can do it within sufficient determinable limits to put it on a business basis. Also, prudent people can determine what, in general, their lives are going to be. But our attitude

78. *Ibid.*

79. Mead, *Philosophy of the Present*, p. 15

toward the future is always of a statistical sort. That is, it is highly probable that things that have happened in the past—like the rising and setting of the sun, the experience of colors, sounds, and so forth—will happen in the future. We think there are probable future occurrences, but we have no evidence of it outside the statistical estimate. When things happen, we can turn back on them and analyze them, but what is going to happen is something of which we can never get hold.”⁸⁰

The past is an explanation for what is (for a present); it is what went before *as it is related* to what is happening now. The future is the possibilities and probabilities of what will happen later on. Past and present are the forward and backward implications of a present. The past is not just a previous present and the future is not just a present yet to come. When the “past” was in existence it was not a past, but a present. When the “future” comes into existence it will not be the future, but a present. Past and future as such have true existence only as they are related to a passing present. Before or after this relationship they are different entities altogether.

The Present Event

The emerging event, that which is happening, is the temporal locus in which past, present and future have immediate and real existence. The emerging object or event contains the past as the general conditions of its own becoming; it possesses its own novel structure as the immediate facts of existence; and it contains the general conditions from which future events will arise. Only as an error of thought does man push the present backward and forward into a “real” past and future someplace behind and ahead. Only by fictitious imaginings does he endow the past and the future with subsistent reality. The fact is that all the apparatus of the past (memories, histories, artifacts, fossil remains) exist only in its causal connections in the events of a passing present. The future exists only in the events of a present as it is imagined or predicted or implicated in them. The complex of passing events (that which exists in immediate time) is the one and only location of reality.

Time

Time is a process of becoming. It is the duration of an event. “There must be at least something that happens to and in the thing which affects the nature of the thing in order that one moment may be distinguished from another, in order that there may be time.”⁸¹ If nothing were happening (if there were no process of becoming), there would be no time and no relationship of past, present and future. Clock time (linear time) is a convenient invention for ordering the occurrences of events, but it

80. Mead, *Movement of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 115-116.

81. Mead, *Philosophy of the Present*, pp. 19-20.

does not define the true nature of time. Real time is the "becoming" process—the duration of an event. It is a temporal spread extended enough for a thing to become what it is, for an event to happen.⁸²

VII

SOCIALITY

The early works of Mead are directed primarily to the development of the thesis that mind and personality belong completely within nature and emerge as by-products of social behavior. His last work advances the idea that the sociality which culminated bio-socially in mind and self is in fact the basic principle governing all emergent realities.⁸³ He suggests that sociality, which is usually conceived of as limited to organisms and especially human organisms, can be generalized to include the whole course of natural development.

It is in emergence that the world takes on the character of sociality. There is a sociality of emergence, which is seen in "the situation in which its advent heralds. Sociality is the capacity of being several things at once."⁸⁴ Concerning this "being several things at once," Mead points out in illustration that an animal pursuing its prey is not only related to the prey, but to the whole jungle system wherein they run, which is itself a part of the life system of the inanimate globe; and this relationship with the environment is just as genuinely social as the relationship with the fleeing prey. In fact, according to Mead's definition of social, it is the very fact that the animal is running, is in the jungle, is on earth, is pursuing its prey, that makes it a social animal, for only in such situations can it be several things at once. There is about us a system of physical relations and a system of vital relations. Neither of these systems can be reduced to the other. Yet any animal living belongs to both orders. Wherever there is life there is sociality, for life means the emergence of a vital, impulsive order within a physical system. The living organism is at the same time a part of each of these two systems.

Sociality is the capacity of the novel event to be several things at the same time. But it is more than this, for not only is the novel event in each of two or more systems, but it is dynamically there, *i.e.*, it is effectively involved in both systems.⁸⁵ The emergence of any novel event carries with it the relations of one system (the old system) into another system (the new system). But it also reflects back upon the old system the uniqueness of its new situation. ". . . Nature takes on new characters . . . with the appearance of life, or the stellar system takes on new

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

characters with the loss of mass by the collapse of atoms through the processes that go on within a star. There is an adjustment to this new situation. The new objects enter into relationships with the old."⁸⁶

It should be noted that Mead uses the term social with reference to the process of readjustment which leads to a new system, and not to the system itself. Concerning this he wrote: "There is an answer in the community in the meadow or the forest to the entrance of any new form, if that form can survive. When the new form has established its citizenship the botanist can exhibit the mutual adjustments that have taken place. The world has become a different world because of the event, but to identify sociality with this result is to identify it with system merely. It is rather the stage betwixt and between the old system and the new that I am referring to. If emergence is a feature of reality this phase of adjustment, which comes between the ordered universe before the emergent has arisen and that after it has come to terms with the newcomer, must be a feature also of reality."⁸⁷ The adjustment of one system to another (*i.e.*, the adjustment of that which was carried over from the old social system with what is emergent in the new system) constitutes for Mead "sociality" in its most general terms. In excessive simplification one might say that Mead's reality can be reduced to three related tenets: (1) The emergence of an event from its historic conditions. (2) The carrying of identical conditions from the past into the present. (3) The process of reorganization of the old to the new (sociality) which results in a new social system. The implications of sociality in emergence are to be found in the occupation by the new object of the old system and the new. It is controlled by laws common to each system: ". . . a body belonging to a system, and having its nature determined by its relations to members of that system, when it passes into a new systematic order will carry over into its process of readjustment in the new something of the nature of all members of the old."⁸⁸

Mead finds sociality in the three great areas of the existence medium: life, consciousness, and the physical world. He recognizes that in the physical world (interpreted relativistically) there are only a few recondite experiments which make accessible to us the effect of changing velocities on things. Furthermore, the processes of life and consciousness have been, until recently, shrouded in vagueness and misinformation. Nevertheless, the fact of immanent sociality stands for Mead with clarion character. In the physical world, in life, and in consciousness there is emergence and this emergence means that an object or group of objects stand simultaneously in two or more systems. Thus, "we find that in one system with

86. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

certain space, time and energy characters, an object moving with high velocity has an increased mass because it is characterized by different space, time and energy coefficients, and the whole physical system is thereby affected. In like manner, it is because an animal is both alive and a part of a physio-chemical world that life is an emergent and extends its influence to the environment about it. It is because the conscious individual is both an animal and is also able to look before and after that consciousness emerges with the meanings and values with which it informs the world.⁸⁹

VIII

Even with this brief investigation of the social concepts of George Mead we can see the exceedingly germinal character of his thought. His ideas are widely suggestive in a wide variety of fields.

For the semanticist he opens a door with his concept of the place of words in the emergence of selfhood. Indeed, words are the very agents of selfhood. And this same concept is equally suggestive to the sociologist. If individuals remain unself-conscious entities until they learn to talk with signification, so also must cultural groups remain only partially realized fragments until significant inter-group communication is achieved. Even more suggestive to the sociologist is Mead's "generalized other." If people become social selves by appropriating a "generalized other," the major problems of social intercourse and of individual behavior would appear to lie primarily in the processes and mechanisms which determine the intellectual atmosphere. To understand a culture should one address himself to the individuals involved in the culture or to the institutions to which the individuals respond and from which they borrow their beliefs and attitudes? Mead leans heavily in the direction of the social matrix, yet of converse importance is his concept of sensate environment. Any environment, cultural as well as physical, is determined by the sensitivity of living individuals. The culture may make the man, but not more than the man makes the culture. Here, it would seem, is a balancing of social elements which should pay rich dividends to further investigation.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

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